



INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification: B41J 2/16, B41J 2/14	A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 00/29217 (43) International Publication Date: 25 May 2000 (25.05.2000)
(21) International Application Number: PCT/GB99/03799 (22) International Filing Date: 15 November 1999 (15.11.1999) (30) Priority Data: 9824998.0 14 November 1998 (14.11.1998) GB 9919201.5 14 August 1999 (14.08.1999) GB		Published
(60) Parent Application or Grant XAAR TECHNOLOGY LIMITED [/]; O. TEMPLE, Stephen [/]; O. HARVEY, Robert, Alan [/]; O. SHEPHERD, Mark, Richard [/]; O. DRURY, Paul, Raymond [/]; O. CONDIE, Angus [/]; O. OMER, Saladin [/]; O. TEMPLE, Stephen [/]; O. HARVEY, Robert, Alan [/]; O. SHEPHERD, Mark, Richard [/]; O. DRURY, Paul, Raymond [/]; O. CONDIE, Angus [/]; O. OMER, Saladin [/]; O. GARRATT, Peter, Douglas ; O.		

(54) Title: DROPLET DEPOSITION APPARATUS
(54) Titre: APPAREIL DE DEPOT PAR GOUTTELETTES

(57) Abstract

An ink jet printhead has a body of PZT (13') bonded to a base plate (13''). Channels cut in the PZT form ink chambers which are actuated by applying voltages to electrodes on surfaces of the chambers. The base plate also carries IC's which contain the drive circuitry for actuating the ink chambers. To ensure reliable electrical interconnection between the chamber electrodes and the IC's, the electrodes (190', 190'') and conducting tracks (192', 192'') on the base plate are formed in a single step by depositing a conductive layer over both the PZT body and the base plate. The necessary pattern of electrodes and tracks can be achieved by masking or by selective material of conductive material.

(57) Abrégé

L'invention porte sur une tête d'imprimante à jet d'encre comprenant un corps en titanate zirconate de plomb (PZT) (13') fixé à un socle (13). Des canaux découpés dans le PZT forment des compartiments à encre qu'on actionne en appliquant des tensions sur des électrodes placées sur des surfaces desdits compartiments. Le socle porte également des circuits intégrés (CI) comprenant les circuits de commande servant à actionner les compartiments à encre. Pour assurer une interconnexion électrique fiable entre les électrodes des compartiments (190', 190'') et les CI, les électrodes et des tracés métalliques (192', 192'') disposés sur le socle sont formés en une seule passe par dépôt d'une couche conductrice à la fois sur le corps de PZT et sur le socle. Le motif nécessaire des électrodes et des tracés métalliques peut être réalisé par masquage ou par sélection d'un matériau conducteur.

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<p>(21) International Application Number: PCT/GB99/03799</p> <p>(22) International Filing Date: 15 November 1999 (15.11.99)</p> <p>(30) Priority Data: 9824998.0 14 November 1998 (14.11.98) GB 9919201.5 14 August 1999 (14.08.99) GB</p> <p>(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): XAAR TECHNOLOGY LIMITED [GB/GB]; Science Park, Cambridge CB4 0XR (GB).</p> <p>(72) Inventors; and (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): TEMPLE, Stephen [GB/GB]; The Windmill, Impington, Cambridge CB4 9NU (GB); HARVEY, Robert, Alan [GB/GB]; 44 Windsor Road, Cambridge CB4 3JN (GB). SHEPHERD, Mark, Richard [GB/GB]; 30 Armingford Crescent, Melbourn, Royston, Herts SG8 6NG (GB). DRURY, Paul, Raymond [GB/GB]; 91 Garden Walk, Royston, Herts SG8 7JN (GB). CONDIE, Angus [GB/GB]; 10 Cage Hill, Swaffham Prior, Cambridge CB3 0JS (GB). OMER, Salhadin [ER/GB]; 111 Kingsway, Cambridge CB4 2EW (GB).</p> <p>(74) Agents: GARRATT, Peter, Douglas et al.; Mathys & Squire, 100 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8AL (GB).</p> <p>(54) Title: DROPLET DEPOSITION APPARATUS</p> <p>(57) Abstract</p> <p>An ink jet printhead has a body of PZT (13') bonded to a base plate (13''). Channels cut in the PZT form ink chambers which are actuated by applying voltages to electrodes on surfaces of the chambers. The base plate also carries IC's which contain the drive circuitry for actuating the ink chambers. To ensure reliable electrical interconnection between the chamber electrodes and the IC's, the electrodes (190', 190'') and conducting tracks (192', 192'') on the base plate are formed in a single step by depositing a conductive layer over both the PZT body and the base plate. The necessary pattern of electrodes and tracks can be achieved by masking or by selective material of conductive material.</p> <p>The diagram illustrates the cross-section of an ink jet printhead. It shows a top layer labeled 13' representing the PZT body, which is bonded to a bottom layer labeled 13'' representing the base plate. On the top surface of the PZT body, there are several rectangular recesses or channels. On the base plate, there are corresponding recesses. Between these recesses, there are two types of features: electrodes and conducting tracks. The electrodes are labeled 190' and 190'', positioned above the base plate. The conducting tracks are labeled 192' and 192'', which are formed on the base plate. The tracks appear to be continuous across the interface between the PZT body and the base plate, suggesting a single-step manufacturing process where a conductive layer is deposited over both components.</p>		

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Description

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DROPLET DEPOSITION APPARATUS

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The present invention relates to droplet deposition apparatus, particularly inkjet printheads, components thereof and methods for manufacturing such components.

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- A particularly useful form of inkjet printer comprises a body of piezoelectric material with ink channels formed, for example, by disc cutting. Electrodes can be plated on the channel-facing surfaces of the piezoelectric material, enabling an electrical field to be applied to the piezoelectric "wall" defined between adjacent channels. With appropriate poling, this wall can be caused to move into or out of the selected ink channel, causing a pressure pulse which ejects an ink droplet through an appropriate channel nozzle. Such a construction is shown, for example, in

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EP-A-0 364 136.

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It is a frequent requirement to provide a high density of such ink channels, with precise registration across a relatively large expanse of printhead, perhaps an entire page width. A construction that is useful to this end is disclosed in

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- 15 WO 98/52763. It involves the use of a flat base plate that supports the piezoelectric material as well as integrated circuits performing the necessary processing and control functions.

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- Such a construction has several advantages, particularly with regard to manufacture. The base plate acts as a "backbone" for the printhead, supporting the piezoelectric material and integrated circuits during manufacture. This support function is particularly important during the process of butting together multiple sheets of piezoelectric material to form a contiguous, pagewide array of ink channels. The relatively large size of the base plate also simplifies handling.

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- A problem remains of reliably and efficiently establishing electrical connection between the ink channel electrodes and the corresponding pins of the integrated circuits. If the base plate is of suitable material and suitably finished, conductive tracks can be deposited on it, these tracks connecting in known manner with the IC pins. There remains the difficulty of establishing connections to channel electrodes.

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The present invention seeks to provide improved apparatus and methods which address this problem.

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Accordingly, the present invention consists in one aspect in a method of manufacturing a component of a droplet deposition apparatus, the component comprising a body of piezoelectric material having a plurality of channels each with a channel surface and a base, the body being attached to a surface of the base which is free of substantial discontinuities; the method comprising the steps of attaching the body to said surface of the base; and depositing a layer of conductive material so as to extend continuously over at least one of said channel surfaces and said surface of the base to provide an electrode on each channel surface and a conductive track on said surface of the base which is integrally connected to the electrode.

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The attachment of the body to a surface of the base and subsequent deposition of a continuous layer of conductive material over said at least one channel surface and the base surface results in an effective and reliable electrical connection between channel wall electrodes and substrate conductive tracks. Those tracks can be used to provide connection with one or more integrated circuits carried on the base, either directly or through other tracks and interconnections.

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The present invention also consists in a component for a droplet deposition apparatus comprising a body of piezoelectric material formed with a plurality of channels each channel having a channel surface; and a separate base having a base surface free of substantial discontinuities; wherein the body is attached to said base surface and a layer of conductive material extends continuously over said channel surfaces of and said base surface, thereby defining an electrode on each channel surface and a conductive track connected thereto on the base surface.

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The invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

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- Figure 1 is a longitudinal sectional view through a known ink jet printhead;
- Figure 2 is a transverse sectional view on line AA of Figure 1
- Figure 3 is an exploded view of a page wide printhead array according to the prior art;

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Figure 4 is an assembled longitudinal sectional view through the printhead shown in Figure 3;

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Figure 5 is an assembled sectional view, similar to that of Figure 4, of a printhead according to a first embodiment of the invention;

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Figures 6(a) and 6(b) are detail sectional views taken perpendicular and parallel to the channel axis of the device of Figure 5;

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Figure 7 is a detail perspective view of the device of Figure 5;

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Figure 8 is a cross-sectional view through a channel of a printhead according to a second embodiment of the invention;

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Figures 9-11 are a sectional views along the channel of third, fourth and fifth embodiments of the invention respectively;

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Figures 12 and 13 are perspective and detail perspective views respectively of the embodiment of Figure 11;

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Figure 14 is a detail view of the area denoted by reference Figure 194 in Figure 6(b);

Figure 15 is a perspective view showing a step in the manufacture of a printhead of the kind shown in Figure 11; and

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Figure 16 is a sectional view illustrating a further modification.

It will be helpful to describe first in some detail, examples of the prior art constructions referred to briefly above.

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Thus, Figure 1 shows a prior art inkjet printhead 1 of the kind disclosed in WO 91/17051 and comprising a sheet 3 of piezoelectric material, for example lead zirconium titanate (PZT), formed in a top surface thereof with an array of open-topped ink channels 7. As evident from Figure 2, which is a sectional view taken along line AA of Figure 1, successive channels in the array are separated by side walls 13 which comprise piezoelectric material poled in the thickness direction of the sheet 3 (as indicated by arrow P). On opposite channel-facing surfaces 17 are arranged electrodes 15 to which voltages can be applied via connections 34. As is known, e.g. from EP-A-0 364 136, application of an electric field between the

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electrodes on either side of a wall results in shear mode deflection of the wall into one of the flanking channels - this is shown exaggerated by dashed lines in Figure 2 - which in turn generates a pressure pulse in that channel.

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The channels are closed by a cover 25 in which are formed nozzles 27 each communicating with respective channels at the mid-points thereof. Droplet ejection from the nozzles takes place in response to the aforementioned pressure pulse, as is well known in the art. Supply of droplet fluid into the channels, indicated by arrows S in Figure 2, is via two ducts 33 cut into the bottom face 35 of sheet 3 to a depth such that they communicate with opposite ends respectively of the channels 7. Such a channel construction may consequently be described a double-ended side-shooter arrangement. A cover plate 37 is bonded to the bottom face 35 to close the ducts.

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Figures 3 and 4 are exploded perspective and sectional views respectively of a printhead employing the double-ended side-shooter concept of Figures 1 and 2 in a "pagewide" configuration. Such a printhead is described in WO 98/52763, incorporated herein by reference. Two rows of channels spaced relatively to one another in the media feed direction are used, with each row extending the width of a page in a direction 'W' transverse to a media feed direction P. Features common with the embodiment of Figures 1 and 2 are indicated by the same reference Figures used in Figures 1 and 2.

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As shown in Figure 4, which is a sectional view taken perpendicular to the direction W, two piezoelectric sheets 82a, 82b each having channels (formed in their bottom surface rather than their top as in the previous example) and electrodes as described above are closed (again on their bottom surface rather than their top) by a flat, extended base 86 in which openings 96a, 96b for droplet ejection are formed. Base 86 is also formed with conductive tracks (not shown) which are electrically connected to respective channel electrodes, e.g. by solder bonds as described in WO 92/22429, and which extend to the edge of the base where respective drive circuitry (integrated circuits 84a, 84b) for each row of channels is located.

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Such a construction has several advantages, particularly with regard to manufacture. Firstly, the extended base 86 acts as a "backbone" for the printhead,

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supporting the piezoelectric sheets 82a,82b and integrated circuits 84a, 84b during manufacture. This support function is particularly important during the process of butting together multiple sheets 3 to form a single, contiguous, pagewide array of channels, as indicated at 82a and 82b in the perspective view of Figure 3. One approach to butting is described in WO 91/17051 and consequently not in any further detail here. The size of the extended cover also simplifies handling.

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Another advantage arises from the fact that the surface of the base on which the conductive tracks are required to be formed is flat, i.e. it is free of any substantial discontinuities. As such, it allows many of the manufacturing steps to be carried out using proven techniques used elsewhere in the electronics industry, e.g. photolithographic patterning for the conductive tracks and "flip chip" for the integrated circuits. Photolithographic patterning in particular is unsuitable where a surface undergoes rapid changes in angle due to problems associated with the spinning method typically used to apply photolithographic films. Flat substrates also have advantages from the point of view of ease of processing, measuring, accuracy and availability.

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A prime consideration when choosing the material for the base is, therefore, whether it can easily be manufactured into a form where it has a surface free of substantial discontinuities. A second requirement is for the material to have thermal expansion characteristics to the piezoelectric material used elsewhere in the printhead. A final requirement is that the material be sufficiently robust to withstand the various manufacturing processes. Aluminium nitride, alumina, INVAR or special glass AF45 are all suitable candidate materials.

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The droplet ejection openings 96a, 96b may themselves be formed with a taper, as per the embodiment of Figure 1, or the tapered shape may be formed in a nozzle plate 98 mounted over the opening. Such a nozzle plate may comprise any of the readily-ablatable materials such as polyimide, polycarbonate and polyester that are conventionally used for this purpose. Furthermore, nozzle manufacture can take place independently of the state of completeness of the rest of the printhead: the nozzle may be formed by ablation from the rear prior to assembly of the active body 82a onto the base or substrate 86 or from the front once the active body is in

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place. Both techniques are known in the art. The former method has the advantage that the nozzle plate can be replaced or the entire assembly rejected at an early stage in assembly, minimising the value of rejected components. The latter method facilitates the registration of the nozzles with the channels of the body when

5 assembled on the substrate.

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Following the mounting of piezoelectric sheets 82a, 82b and drive chips 84a, 84b onto the substrate 86 and suitable testing as described, for example, in

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EP-A-0 376 606 - a body 80 can be attached. This too has several functions, the most important of which is to define, in cooperation with the base or substrate 86, 10 manifold chambers 90, 88 and 92 between and to either side of the two channel rows 82a, 82b respectively. Body 80 is further formed with respective conduits as indicated at 90', 88' and 92' through which ink is supplied from the outside of the

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printhead to each chamber. It will be evident that this results in a particularly compact construction in which ink can be circulated from common manifold 90,

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15 through the channels in each of the bodies (for example to remove trapped dirt or air bubbles) and out through chambers 88 and 92. Body 80 also provides surfaces for attachment of means for locating the completed printhead in a printer and defines further chambers 94a, 94b, sealed from ink-containing chambers 88, 90, 92 and in which integrated circuits 84a, 84b can be located.

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20 Turning now to an example of the present invention, reference is made to Figure 5. This is a sectional view similar to that of Figure 4, illustrating a printhead in accordance with the present invention. Wherever features are common with the embodiments of Figure 1-4, the same reference figures as used in Figures 1-4 have been used.

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25 As with the previous embodiments, the printhead of Figure 5 comprises a "pagewide" base plate or substrate 86 on which two rows of integrated circuits 84 are mounted. In-between lies a row of channels 82 formed in the substrate 84, each 45 channel of which communicates with two spaced nozzles 96a, 96b for droplet ejection and with manifolds 88, 92 and 90 arranged to either side and between

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30 nozzles 96a; 96b respectively for ink supply and circulation.

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In contrast to the printhead embodiments discussed above, the piezoelectric material for the channel walls is incorporated in a layer 100 made up of two strips 110a, 110b. As in the embodiment of Figure 4, these strips will be butted together in the page width direction W, each strip extending approximately 5-10 cm (this being 5 the typical dimension of the wafer in which form such material is generally supplied).
15 Prior to channel formation, each strip is bonded to the continuous planar surface 120 of the substrate 86, following which channels are sown or otherwise formed so as to extend through both strip and substrate. A cross-section through a channel, its associated actuator walls and nozzle is shown in Figure 6. Such an actuator wall
20 construction is known, e.g. from EP-A-0 505 065 and consequently will not be discussed in any greater detail. Similarly, appropriate techniques for removing both the glue bonds between adjacent butted strips of piezoelectric material and the glue
25 relief channels used in the bond between each piezoelectric strip and the substrate are known from US 5,193,256 and WO 95/04658 respectively.

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15 In accordance with the present invention, a continuous layer of conductive material is then applied over the channel walls and substrate. Not only does this form electrodes 190 for application of electric fields to the piezoelectric walls 13 - as illustrated in Figure 6(a) - and conductive tracks 192 on substrate 86 for supply of voltages to those electrodes as shown in Figure 6(b) - it also forms an electrical
20 connection between these two elements as shown at 194.

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Appropriate electrode materials and deposition methods are well-known in the art. Copper, Nickel and Gold, used alone or in combination and deposited advantageously by electroless processes utilising palladium catalyst will provide the necessary integrity, adhesion to the piezoelectric material, resistance to corrosion
45 and basis for subsequent passivation e.g. using Silicon Nitride as known in the art.

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As is generally known, e.g. from the aforementioned EP-A-0 364 136, the electrodes on opposite sides of each actuator wall 13 must be electrically isolated from one another in order that an electric field may be established between them and hence across the piezoelectric material of the actuator wall. This is shown in
55 both the prior art arrangement of Figure 2 and the embodiment of the present

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invention shown in Figure 6(a). The corresponding conductive tracks connecting each electrode with a respective voltage source must be similarly isolated.

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In the present invention, such isolation may be achieved at the time of deposition for example by masking those areas - such as the tops of the channel walls - where conductive material is not required. Suitable masking techniques, including patterned screens and photolithographically patterned masking materials are well-known in the art, e.g. from WO 98/17477 and EP-A-0 397 441, and will not be described in any further detail.

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Alternatively, isolation may be achieved after deposition by removing conductive material from those areas where it is not required. Localised vaporisation of material by laser beam, as known e.g. from JP-A-09 010 983, has proved most suitable for achieving the high accuracy required, although other conventional removal methods - inter alia sand blasting, etching, electropolishing and wire erosion may also be suitable. Figure 7 illustrates material removal, in this case over a narrow band running along the top of the wall, although several passes of the laser beam (or a single pass of a wider laser beam) can be used to remove material from the entire top surface of the wall so as to maximise the wall top area available for bonding with the cover member 130.

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In addition to removing conductive material from the top surface 13' of each piezoelectric actuator wall 13 so as to separate the electrodes 190', 190'', on either side of each wall, conductive material must also be removed from the surface of the substrate 86 in such a way as to define respective conductive tracks 192', 192'' for each electrode 190' 190''. At the transition between piezoelectric material 100 and substrate 86, the end surface of the piezoelectric material 100 is angled or chamfered as shown at 195. As is known, this has the advantage over a perpendicular cut (of the kind indicated by a dashed line at 197) of allowing the vapourising laser beam - shown figuratively by arrow 196 - to impinge on and thereby remove the conductive material without requiring angling of the beam. Preferably, the chamfer 195 is formed by milling after the piezoelectric layer 100 has been attached to the substrate 86 but before the formation of the channel walls

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which, being typically 300 μ m thick and formed of ceramic and glass, are vulnerable to damage. A chamfer angle of 45 degrees has been found to be suitable.

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It will also be appreciated that the electrodes and conductive tracks associated with the active portions 140a need to be isolated from those associated with 140b in order that the rows of nozzles might be operated independently.

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Although this too may be achieved by a laser "cut" along the surface of the substrate 86 extending between the two piezoelectric strips, it is more simply achieved by the use of a physical mask during the electrode deposition process or by the use of electric discharge machining.

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- 10 Laser machining can also be used in a subsequent step to form the ink ejection holes 96a, 96b in the base of each channel, as is known in the art. Such holes may directly serve as ink ejection nozzles. Alternatively, there may be bonded to the lower surface of the substrate 86 a separate plate (not shown) having nozzles that communicate with the holes 96a, 96b and which are of a higher quality than
- 15 might otherwise be possible with nozzles formed directly in the ceramic or glass base of the channel. Appropriate techniques are well-known, particularly from WO 93/15911 which discloses a technique for the formation of nozzles in situ, after attachment of the nozzle plate, thereby simplifying registration of each nozzle with its respective channel.

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- 20 The conductive tracks 192', 192" defined by laser may extend all the way from the transition area 195 to the integrated circuits 84 located at either side of the substrate. Alternatively, the laser track definition process may be restricted to an area directly adjacent the piezoelectric material and a different - e.g. photolithographic - process used to define further conductive tracks that connect the
- 25 laser-defined tracks with the integrated circuits 84.

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- Having established tile electrical connections, it remains only to adhesively bond (e.g. using an offset method) a cover member 130 to the surface of substrate 86. This cover fulfils several functions: firstly, it closes each channel along those portions 140a, 140b where the walls incorporate piezoelectric material in order that
- 30 actuation of the material and the resulting deflection of the walls might generate a

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pressure pulse in the channel portions and cause ejection of a droplet through a respective opening. Secondly, the cover and substrate define between them ducts 150a, 150b and 150c which extend along either side of each row of active channel portions 140a, 140b and through which ink is supplied. The cover is also formed

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- 5 with ports 88, 90, 92 which connect ducts 150a, 150b and 150c with respective parts of an ink system. In addition to replenishing the ink that has been ejected, such a system may also circulate ink through the channels (as indicated by arrows 112) for heat, dirt and bubble removing purposes as is known in the art. A final function of the cover is to seal the ink-containing part of the printhead from the outside world
- 10 and particularly the electronics 84. This has been found to be satisfactorily achieved by the adhesive bond between the substrate 86 and cover rib 132, although additional measures such as glue fillets could be employed. Alternatively, cover rib
- 25 may be replaced by an appropriately shaped gasket member.

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- Broadly expressed, the printhead of Figure 5 includes a first layer having a continuous planar surface; a second layer of piezoelectric material bonded to said continuous planar surface; at least one channel that extends through the bonded first and second layers; the second layer having first and second portions spaced along the length of the channel; and a third layer that serves to close on all sides lying parallel to the axis of the channel portions of the channel defined by said first and second portions of said second layer.

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- It will be appreciated that restricting the use of piezoelectric material to those "active" portions of the channel where it is required to displace the channel walls is an efficient way of utilising what is a relatively expensive material. The capacitance associated with the piezoelectric material is also minimised, reducing the load on -
- 20 and thus the cost of - the driving circuitry.

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- Whereas the printhead of Figures 5 and 6 employs actuator walls of the "cantilever" type in which only part of the wall distorts in response to the application of an actuating electric field, the actuator walls of the printhead of Figures 8 and 9 actively distort over their entire height into a chevron shape. As is well-known and 30 illustrated in Figure 8, such a "chevron" actuator has upper and lower wall parts 250,260 poled in opposite directions (as indicated by arrows) and electrodes

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190°, 190° on opposite surfaces for applying a unidirectional electric field over the entire height of the wall. The approximate distorted shape of the wall when subjected to electric fields is shown exaggerated in dashed lines 270 on the right-hand side of Figure 8.

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Various methods of manufacturing such "chevron" actuator walls are known in the art, e.g. from EP-A-0 277 703, EP-A-0 326 973 and WO 92/09436. For the printhead of Figures 9 and 10, two sheets of piezoelectric material are first arranged such that their directions of polarisation face one another. The sheets are then laminated together, cut into strips and finally bonded to an inactive substrate 86, as

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10 already explained with regard to Figure 5.

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One consequence of the entire actuator wall height being defined by piezoelectric material is that there is no need to saw wall-defining grooves into the inactive substrate 86. There remains, of course, the need for the length of the nozzles 96a, 96b to be kept to a minimum so as to minimise losses that would otherwise reduce the droplet ejection velocity. To this end, the substrate can be reduced in thickness either locally by means of a trench 300 as shown in Figure 9 and formed advantageously by sawing, grinding or moulding - or overall per Figure 10. Both arrangements need to provide free passage for a disc cutter (shown diagrammatically in dashed lines at 320) used to form the channels in the

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20 piezoelectric strips.

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Following channel formation and in accordance with the present invention, conductive material is then deposited and electrodes/conductive tracks defined. In the examples shown, piezoelectric strips 110a and 110b are chamfered to facilitate laser patterning, as described above. Nozzle holes 96a, 96b are also formed at two

25 points along each channel.

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Finally a cover member 130 is bonded to the tops of the channel walls so as to create the closed, "active" channel lengths necessary for droplet ejection. In the printhead of Figure 9, the cover member need only comprise a simple planar member formed with ink supply ports 88, 90, 92 since gaps 150a, 150b, 150c necessary for distributing the ink along the row of channels are defined between the lower surface 340 of that cover member 130 and the surface 345 of the trench 300.

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Sealing of the channels is achieved at 330 by the adhesive bond (not shown) between the lower surface 340 of the cover 130 and the upper surface of the substrate. Broadly expressed, the printhead of this third invention embodiment includes a first layer of inactive material; a second layer of piezoelectric material comprising first and second portions formed with channels and bonded to the first layer in a spaced relationship; a third layer that serves to close the channels on all sides lying parallel to their axes; and outlets formed in the first layer for ink ejection from said channels in said portions of the second layer.

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In the embodiment of Figure 10, the simplicity of substrate 86 formed without trench 300 is offset by the need to form a trench-like structure 350 (defined, for example, by a projecting rib 360) in the cover 130 so as to define ink supply ducts 150a, 150b, 150c.

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Turning to the embodiment of Figure 11, this also employs the combination of a simple substrate 86 and a more-complex cover 130, in this case a composite structure made up of a spacer member 410 and a planar cover member 420. Unlike previous embodiments, however, it is the substrate 86 rather than the cover that is formed with ink supply ports 88, 90, 92 and the cover 130 rather than the substrate that is formed with holes 96 for droplet ejection. In the example shown, these holes communicate with nozzles formed in a nozzle plate 430 attached to the planar cover member 420.

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Figure 12 is a cut-away perspective view of the printhead of Figure 11 seen from the cover side. The strips 110a, 110b of "chevron"-poled piezoelectric laminate have been bonded to substrate 86, and subsequently cut to form channels. A continuous layer of conductive material has then been deposited over the strips and parts of the substrate and electrodes and conductive tracks defined thereon in accordance with the present invention. As explained with regard to Figures 5 and 6, the strips are chamfered on either side (at 195) to aid laser patterning in this transition area.

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Figure 13 is an enlarged view with spacer member 410 removed to show the conductive tracks 192 in more detail. Although not shown for reasons of clarity, it will be appreciated that these, like channels 7, extend across the entire width of the

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- 13 -

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printhead. In the area of the substrate adjacent each strip (indicated by arrow 500 with regard to strip 110b) the tracks are continuous with the electrodes (not shown) on the facing walls of each channel, having been deposited in the same manufacturing step. This provides an effective electrical contact in accordance with

5 the present invention.

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However, elsewhere on the substrate - as indicated at 510 - more conventional techniques, for example photolithographic, can be used to define not only tracks 192 leading from the channel electrodes to the integrated circuits 84 but also further tracks 520 for conveying power, data and other signals to the integrated

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circuits. Such techniques may be more cost effective, particularly where the conductive tracks are diverted around ink supply ports 92 and which would otherwise require complex positional control of a laser. They are preferably formed on the alumina substrate in advance of the ink supply ports 88, 90, 92 being drilled (e.g. by laser) and of the piezoelectric strips 110a, 110b being attached, chamfered

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15 and sawn. Following deposition of conductive material in the immediate area of the strips, a laser can then be used to ensure that each track is connected only with its respective channel electrode and no other.

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Thereafter, both electrodes and tracks will require passivation, e.g. using Silicon Nitride deposited in accordance with WO 95/07820. Not only does this 35 provide protection against corrosion due to the combined effects of electric fields and the ink (it will be appreciated that all conductive material contained within the area 420 defined by the inner profile 430 of spacer member 410 will be exposed to ink), it also prevents the electrodes on the opposite sides of each wall being short circuited by the planar cover member 430. Both cover and spacer are

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25 advantageously made of molybdenum which, in addition to having similar thermal expansion characteristics to the alumina used elsewhere in the printhead, can be easily machined, e.g. by etching, laser cutting or punching, to high accuracy. This is 45 particularly important for the holes for droplet ejection 96 and, to a lesser extent, for the wavy, bubble-trap-avoiding, inner profile 430 of the spacer member 410. Bubble traps are further avoided by positioning the trough 440 of the wavy profile such that it 30 aligns with or even overlies the edge of the respective ink port 92. Crest 450 of the

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wavy profile is similarly dimensioned (to lie a distance - typically 3mm, approximately 1.5 times the width of each strip 110a, 110b - from the edge of the adjacent strip 110a, 110b to ensure avoidance of bubble traps without affecting the ink flow into the channels.

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5 Spacer member 410 is subsequently secured to the upper surface of substrate 86 by a layer of adhesive. In addition to its primary, securing function, this layer also provides back-up electrical isolation between the conductive tracks on the substrate. Registration features such as notch 440 are used to ensure correct alignment.

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10 The last two members to be adhesively attached - either separately or following assembly to one another - are the planar cover member 420 and nozzle plate 430. Optical means may be employed to ensure correct registration between the nozzles formed in the nozzle plate and the channels themselves. Alternatively, the nozzles can be formed once the nozzle plate is in situ as known, for example, 15 from WO 93/15911.

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A further feature is illustrated in Figure 14, which is a detail view of the area denoted by reference figure 194 in Figure 6(b). The fillet 550 created when adhesive is squeezed out during creating of the joint between the piezoelectric layer 100 and substrate 86 is advantageously retained when chamfer 195 is formed on

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20 the end surface of the layer as described above. This adhesive fillet is subsequently exposed when the assembly is subjected to a pre-plating cleaning step (e.g. plasma etching) and provides a good key for the electrode material 190 in an area that would otherwise be vulnerable to plating faults

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45 A further modification is explained with reference to Figure 15. As already explained above, the piezoelectric material for the channel walls is incorporated in a layer 100 made up of two strips 110a, 110b each butted with other strips in the direction W necessary for a wide array of channels. Depending on whether the actuator is of the "cantilever" or "chevron" type, the piezoelectric layer will be polarised in one or two (opposed) directions and, in the latter case, may be formed 50 from two oppositely-polarised sheets laminated together as shown at 600 and 610 in Figure 15. To facilitate relative positioning, strips 110a, 110b are connected

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together by a bridge piece 620 that is removed in the chamfering step that takes place once strip 100 and substrate 86 have been bonded together using adhesive.

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A still further modification is illustrated in Figure 16. Here, the integrated circuit 84 is not mounted on the substrate 86 but on an auxiliary substrate 700,

- 5 which may be single or multi-layer. The substrate 86 is appropriately bonded to the auxiliary substrate 700 and wire bonds 702 connect the conductive tracks on the substrate 86 with the pins of the integrated circuit. Further wire bonds 704 then interconnect the integrated circuit with pads 708 on the auxiliary substrate 700.

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The present invention has been explained with regard to the figures contained

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- 10 herein but is in no way restricted to such embodiments. In particular, the present techniques are applicable to printheads of varying width and resolution, pagewide double-row being merely one of many suitable configurations. Printheads having more than two rows, for example, are easily realised using tracks used in multiple layers as well-known elsewhere in the electronics industry.

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- 15 All documents, particularly patent applications, referred to are incorporated in the present application by reference.

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- 16 -

CLAIMS

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1. A method of manufacturing a component of a droplet deposition apparatus, the component comprising a body of piezoelectric material having a plurality of channels each with a channel surface and a base, the body being attached to a surface of the base which is free of substantial discontinuities; the method comprising the steps of attaching the body to said surface of the base; and depositing a layer of conductive material so as to extend continuously over at least one of said channel surfaces and said surface of the base to provide an electrode on each channel surface and a conductive track on said surface of the base which is integrally connected to the electrode.

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2. A method according to Claim 1, comprising the further step of removing regions of the layer of conductive material to define electrodes for different channels which electrodes are electrically isolated one from another.

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3. A method according to Claim 1 or Claim 2, comprising the further step of removing regions of the layer of conductive material to define conductive tracks which are electrically isolated one from another.

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4. A method according to Claim 2 or Claim 3, wherein said regions of the layer of conductive material are removed through local vaporisation of conductive material.

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5. A method according to Claim 4, wherein conductive material is vaporised through the use of a laser beam.

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- 17 -

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6. A method according to any one of Claims 2 to 5, wherein a strip of conductive material is removed from a land on the body which is defined between neighbouring channels.

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7. A method according to Claim 1, wherein said layer is deposited in a pattern to define electrodes for different channels, which electrodes are electrically isolated one from another.

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8. A method according to Claim 1 or Claim 7, wherein said layer is deposited in a pattern defining a plurality of said conductive tracks which are electrically isolated one from another.

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9. A method according to Claim 7 or Claim 8, wherein patterning of the deposited conductive layer is achieved through the use of masking.

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10. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the body is attached to the base prior to formation of the channels in the body.

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11. A method according to Claim 10, wherein the channels are formed through removal of regions of the body.

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12. A method according to Claim 11, wherein the step of removing regions of the body serves to define discrete walls of piezoelectric material, separated one from each other.

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13. A method according to Claim 11 or Claim 12, wherein the step of removing regions of the body serves also to remove regions of the base.

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- 18 -

10 14. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the body is chamfered adjacent the base so as provide regions of the deposited layer of conductive material which overlie the body and the base respectively and which meet at an obtuse angle.

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15 15. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the body is attached to the base through adhesive, there being defined between the body and the base a fillet of said adhesive which serves as a key for the deposited layer of conductive material.

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16. A component for a droplet deposition apparatus comprising a body of piezoelectric material formed with a plurality of channels each channel having a channel surface; and a separate base having a base surface free of substantial discontinuities; wherein the body is attached to said base surface and a layer of conductive material extends continuously over said channel surfaces of and said base surface, thereby defining an electrode on each channel surface and a conductive track connected thereto on the base surface.

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17. A component according to Claim 16, wherein an integrated circuit is carried on the base, said conductive tracks serving to provide electrical interconnection between the electrodes and the integrated circuit.

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18. A component according to Claim 16 or Claim 17, wherein the base surface is substantially planar.

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19. A component according to any one of Claims 16 to 18, wherein the body abuts the base at an obtuse angle.

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- 19 -

10 20. A component according to any one of Claims 16 to 19, wherein the base is formed of a material selected from the group consisting of aluminium nitride, alumina, invar or glass.

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21. A component according to any one of Claims 16 to 20, wherein the conductive material is selected from the group consisting of copper, nickel, gold and alloys thereof.

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22. A component according to any one of Claims 16 to 21, wherein the conductive material is deposited through electroless plating.

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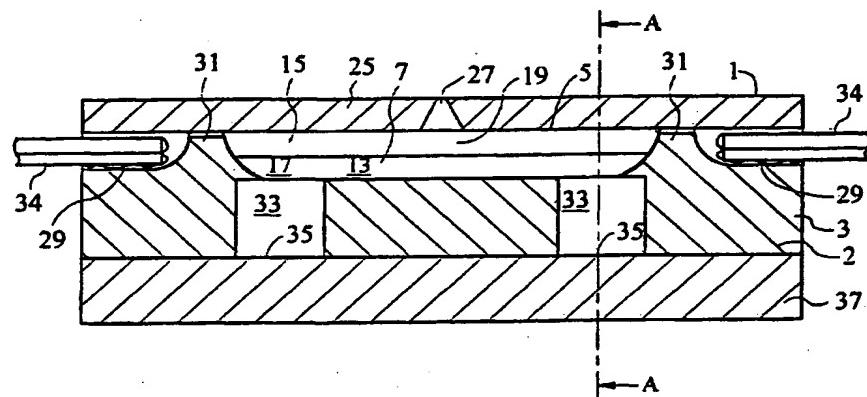
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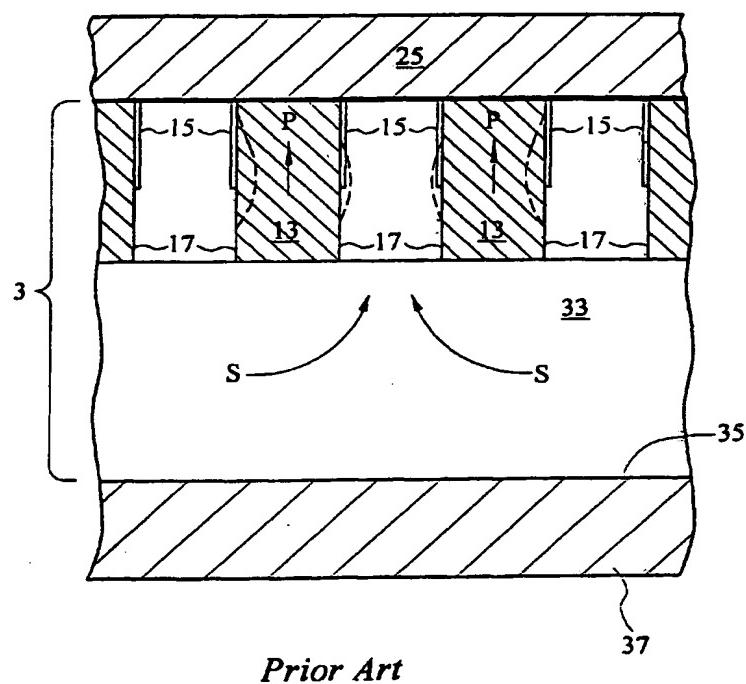


Prior Art

Fig. 1

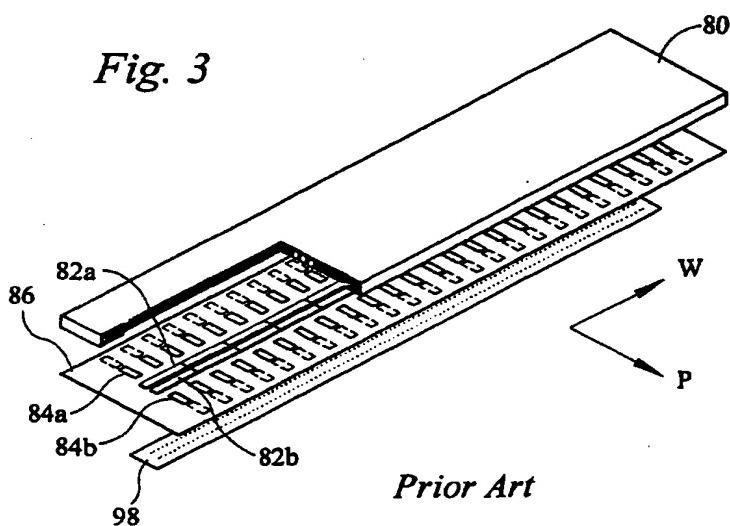
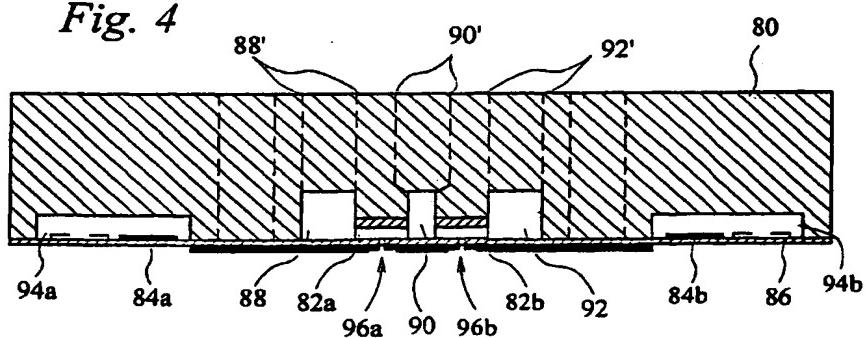
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Fig. 2*Prior Art*

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Fig. 3*Prior Art**Fig. 4**Prior Art*

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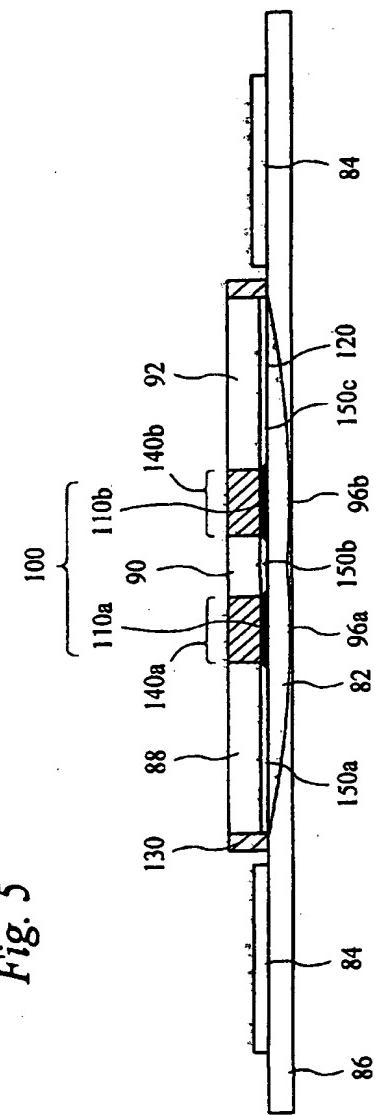


Fig. 5

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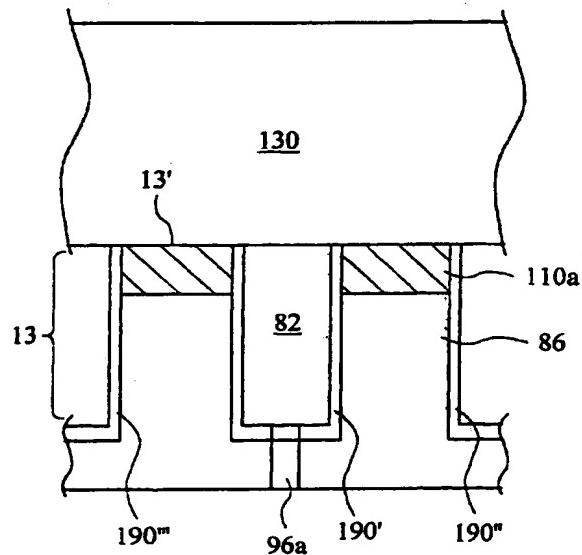


Fig. 6A

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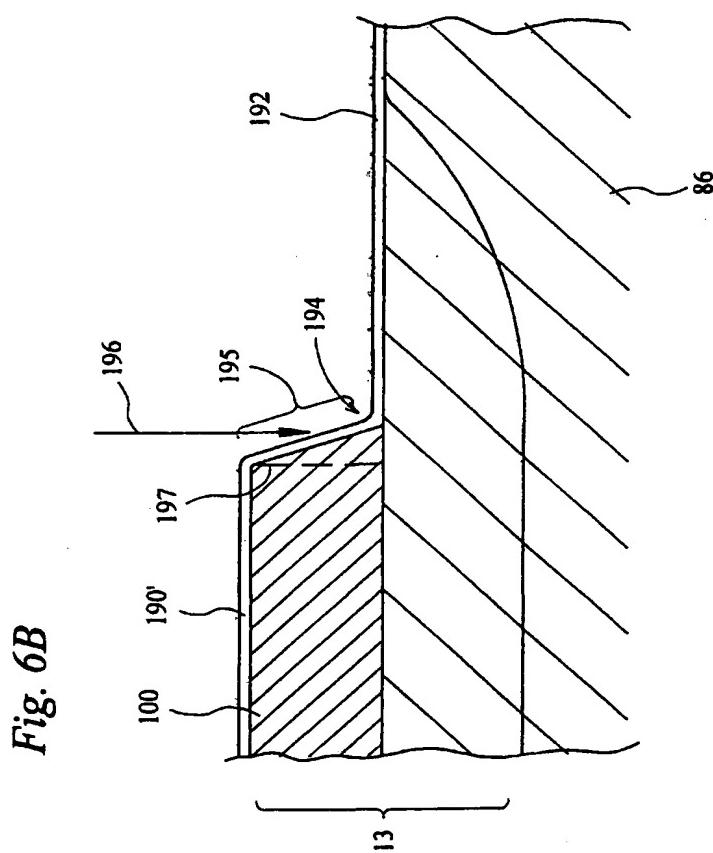
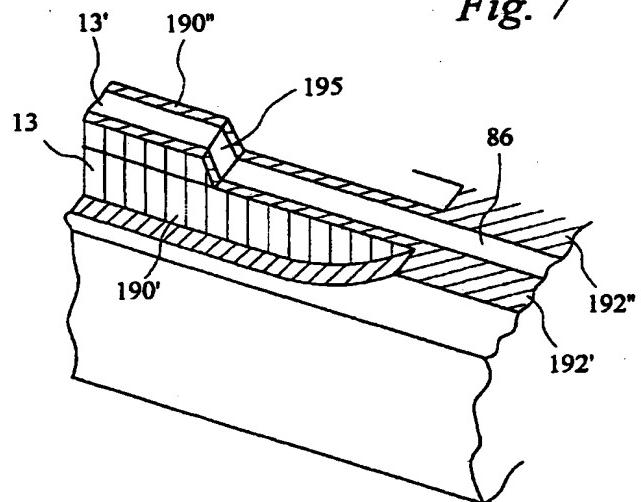


Fig. 6B

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Fig. 7

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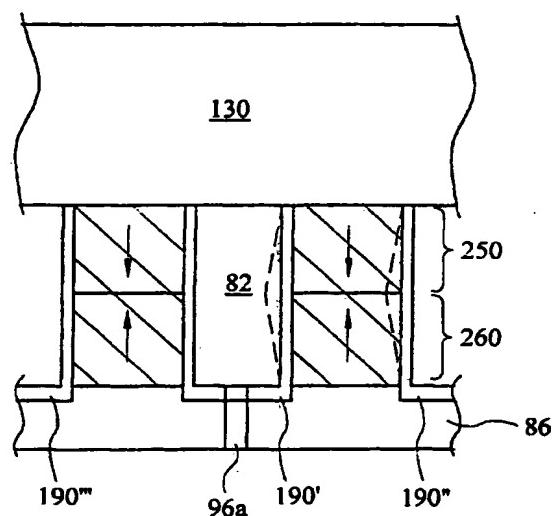
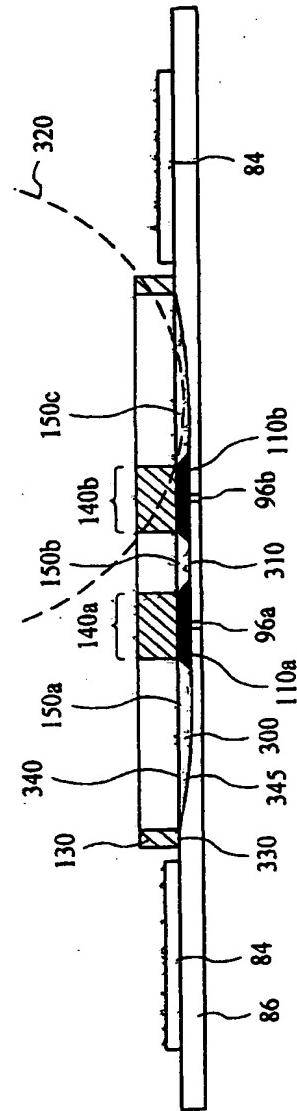
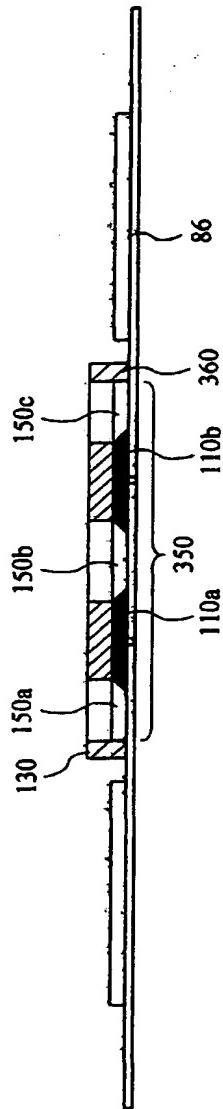


Fig. 8

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Fig. 10

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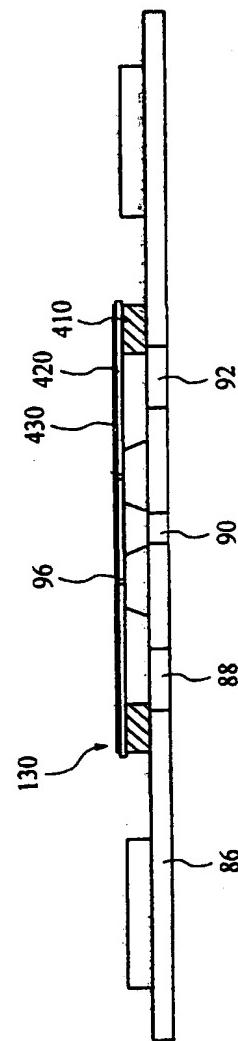


Fig. 11

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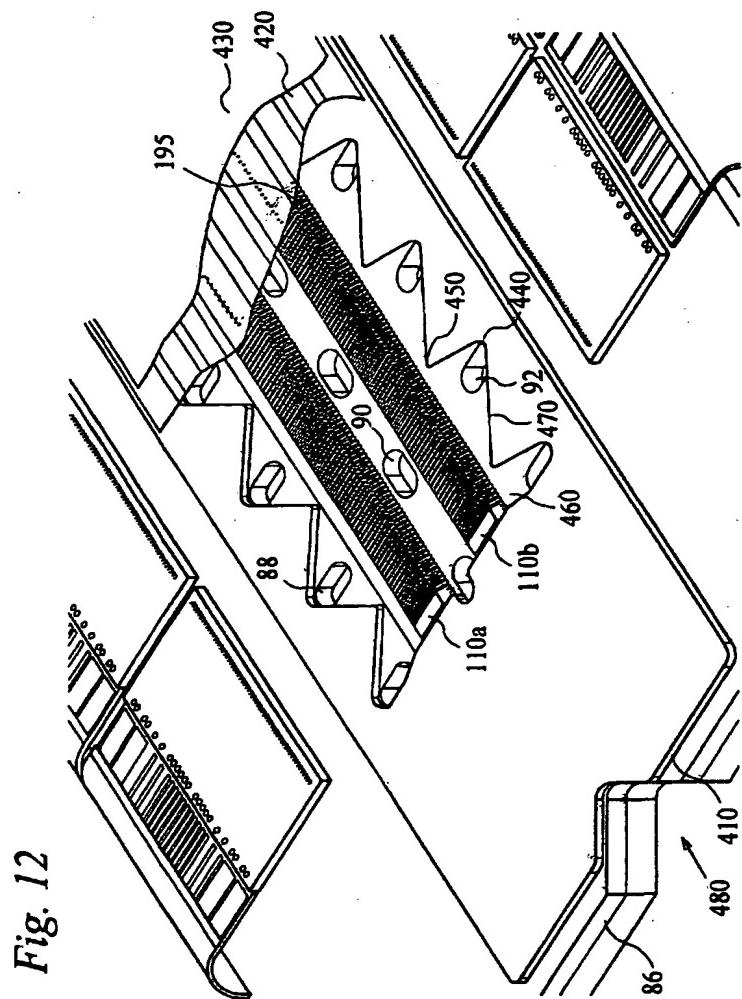


Fig. 12

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WO 00/29217

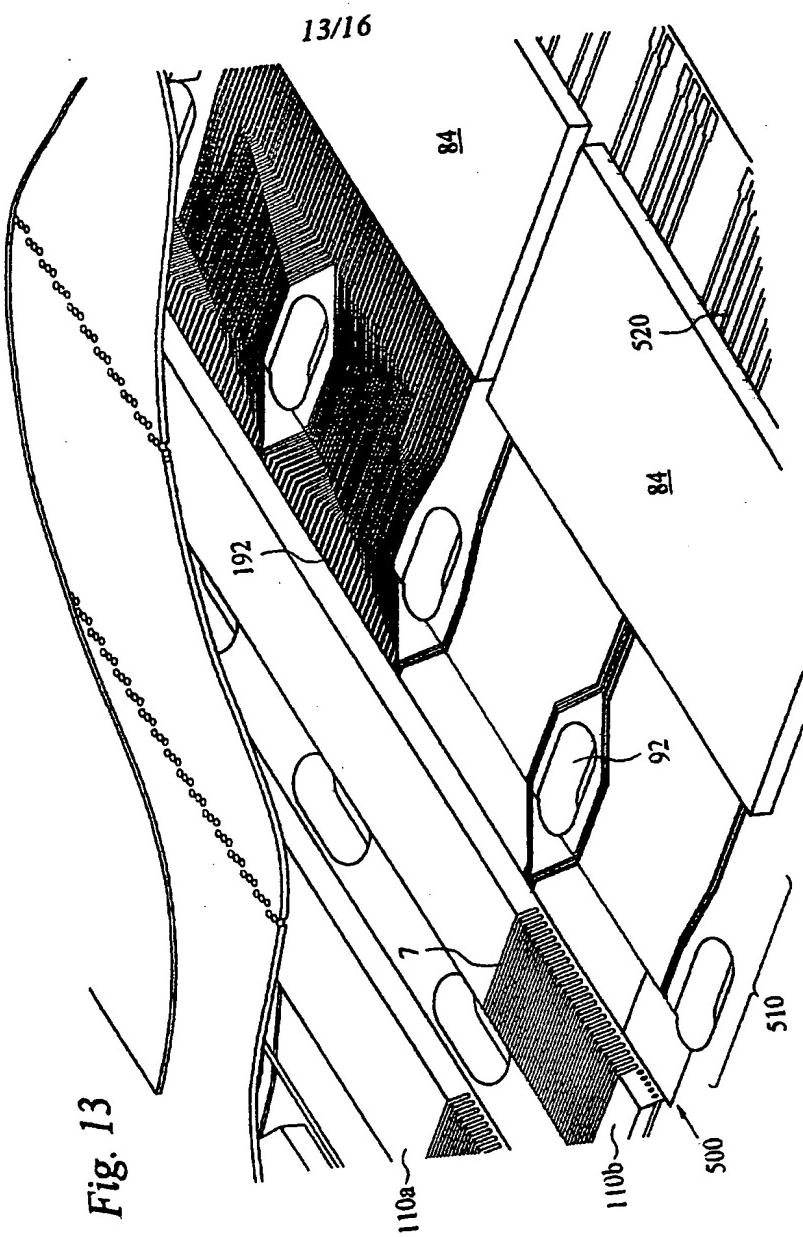


Fig. 13

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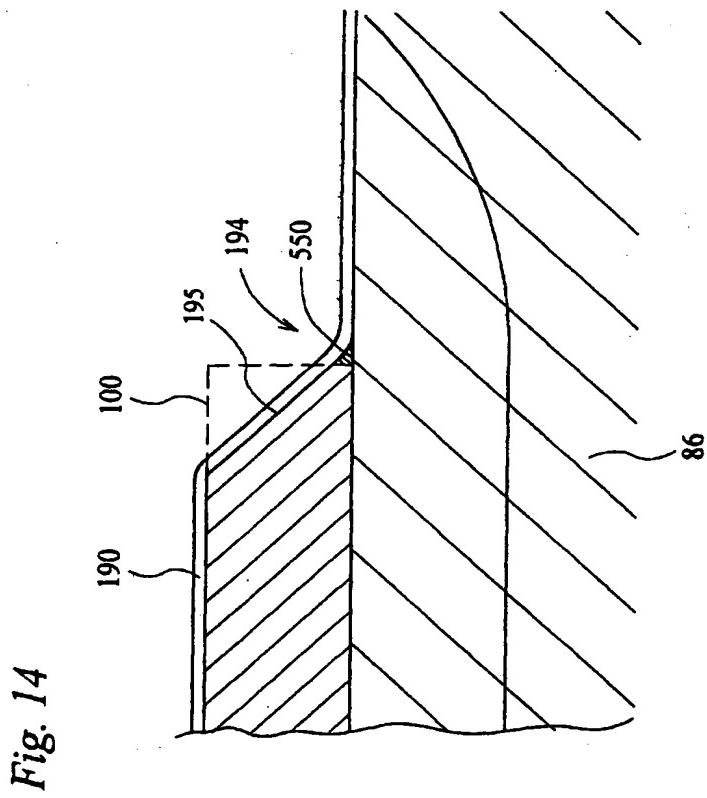
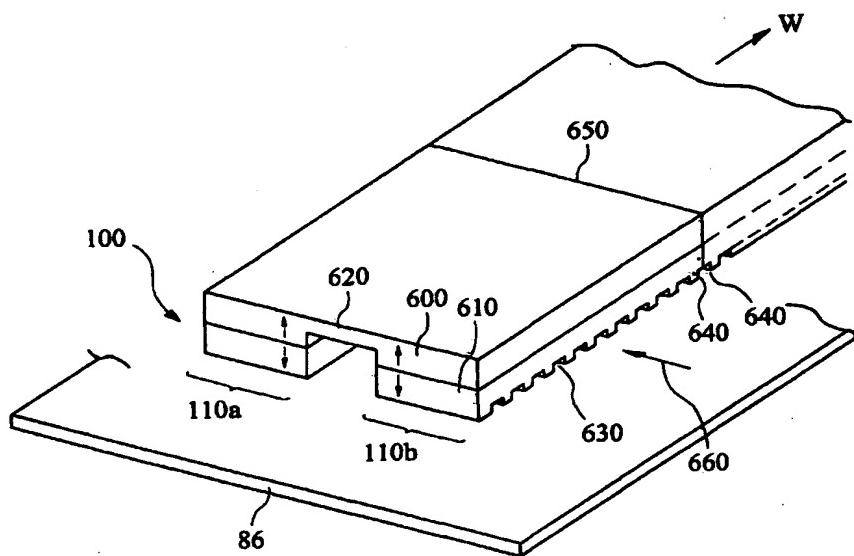


Fig. 14

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Fig. 15**SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)**

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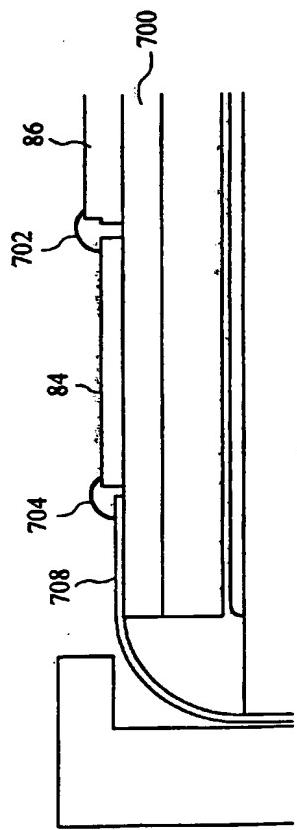


Fig. 16

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No.
PCT/GB 99/03799

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 B41J2/16 B41J2/14

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 B41J

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the International search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to date No.
X	EP 0 839 656 A (NIPPON ELECTRIC CO) 6 May 1998 (1998-05-06) column 14, line 38 - line 53; figures 176,186,25,26	1,16
A	EP 0 755 792 A (SEIKO EPSON CORP) 29 January 1997 (1997-01-29) abstract column 10, line 27 -column 12, line 2 column 12, line 50 -column 14, line 14 figures 14,15,23-28	16
A	EP 0 704 305 A (COMPAQ COMPUTER CORP) 3 April 1996 (1996-04-03) the whole document	1,16

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10/03/2000

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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C(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	EP 0 522 814 A (TOKYO ELECTRIC CO LTD) 13 January 1993 (1993-01-13) cited in the application the whole document	1-19
A	EP 0 505 065 A (TOKYO ELECTRIC CO LTD) 23 September 1992 (1992-09-23) cited in the application the whole document	1-19

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